Sermon 19: The Fire & The Ash

Understanding Nibbana through the Philosophy of Extinguishment

Based on the teachings of Bhikkhu Katukurunde Nyanananda. An exploration of the paradox of existence as a burning state and Nibbana as the cessation of the flame.

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The Trap of Destination

The Misconception

It is common to view Nibbana as an “eternal home” or a metaphysical place one enters after death. This is the error of Eternalism—mistaking the “Unprepared” for a permanent version of the “Prepared.”

The Limit of Language

Like a fish asking a tortoise to describe “dry land” using aquatic terms (“Is it wet? Is it wavy?”), we fail when we try to map Nibbana using the coordinates of existence.

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The Physics of Flame

To understand Nibbana, we must look at a fire.

When the fuel is exhausted, where does the fire go? Does it go North, South, East, or West?

It does not ‘go’ **anywhere.** It simply ceases to exist because the conditions for its existence (fuel) are no longer present.

Nibbana is not a relocation; **it is an extinguishment.**

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The Two Stages of Extinguishment

1. Saupādisesa (With Residue)

The fire is out, but the embers still glow. This is the living Arahant. The defilements are gone, but the physical body and sensory experience remain.

2. Anupādisesa (Without Residue)

The embers go cold. This is the final passing. The “organic combination” is discarded, and all experience cools completely.

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Realized Here and Now (Sanditthika)

We do not wait for death to be free. The Arahant experiences the ‘Deathless’ while still breathing, walking, and talking.

“It is the ‘cooling’ of the passions (lust, hate, delusion). The Arahant walks through the fires of sensory input but remains unburned.”

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The Paradox of Certainty

How can one realize an ‘after-death’ state while alive?

The Analogy: If you cut the oil supply and the wick of a lamp, you know with absolute certainty that the light will go out. You do not need to wait for the darkness to prove it.

The Arahant has **destroyed the fuel** of craving; therefore, **they are certain that no future birth will arise.**

Replacing Faith with Vision

The Story of General Siha

General Siha told the Buddha he knew the fruits of generosity here and now through direct experience. He only **relied on faith regarding the afterlife (rebirth).**

The Shift: When Nibbana is seen, faith is replaced by direct knowledge. The ‘Unmade’ (*Akata*) is known, making faith redundant.

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The Floral Design (Sankhata vs. Asankhata)

Existence is a ‘Prepared’ floral design, held together by the **Glue of Craving** and the **Knots of Conceit**.

Nibbana is not the destruction of the flower, but the **dissolving of the glue.** The design simply falls apaıt into the ‘Unprepared’.

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The End of Time (*Kalamakari*)

At the moment of passing, the Buddha did not need to strive. He was already free. Death was merely the biological machine stopping. He made an '**End of Time**,' distinguishing his passing from the death of ordinary beings who are swept away by time.

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The Myth of Dabba: A Critique of Literalism

The monk Dabba is described as flying into the air and burning himself up, leaving no ash.

The source argues this was likely a metaphor for ‘vanishing without a trace’ (like a spark) that later tradition took literally. Literalism can lead to wrong views. The point was the vanishing, not the burning body.

Describing the Indescribable

A fish asks a tortoise about ‘Dry Land’.
‘Is it wet?’
‘No.’
‘Is it wavy?’
‘No.’ The fish concludes land does not exist.

Like the fish, we fail to understand Nibbana because we try to define it by the characteristics of existence (time, location, feeling). It can only be described by what it is *not*.

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The Unshakable Deliverance (Akuppa Ceto Vimutti)

Nibbana is called the ‘Refuge,’ but it is not a physical place. It is a state of mind that Mara (Death/Illusion) cannot find. Because the Arahant has no ‘grasping,’ there is nothing for Mara to hold onto.

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The Middle Way: Neither Something nor Nothing

Not Annihilationism: Nibbana is not the destruction of a self, because a permanent self never existed.
Not Eternalism: Nibbana is not a soul entering an everlasting heaven.
The Reality: It is the Cessation of Grasping. It is the end of the burning.

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The Peace of the Sage

‘The Sage at peace no longer dies.’ Because he has ceased to be ‘born’ in the mind. The fire is out. The ash is cool. The journey is over.

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Source Material

This presentation is based on Sermon 19: The Nibbana Sermons by Bhikkhu Katukurunde Nyanananda. With additional commentary and comparative study notes.

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